

Only Once A Day

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Summary: "My quota is over!" Once and Future King promptly clasped his hands back over his eyes.

1. Tantrum

****Muse bit meâ€|. Wound infectedâ€| Results below****

Arthur was having the worst day ever.

Seriously, he needed to ask Merlin if he was cursed. Trouble seemed to dog his steps everywhere he went. Or wait maybe it was Merlin who was cursed and since that idiot was a leech to his side, he was bearing the brunt of it!

All he had wanted was a day away from his Kingly duties. A hunt with his friends. Was this too much to ask?

The past month had been filled with trade talks, farmers' meets, guild workers' council and every other boring, mind numbing congregation. He had desperately wanted, no needed a respite or he would have gone mad. Hence the hunt.

What was more relaxing invigorating than stalking and bagging game. A night or two in the rough with his men would have certainly lifted his spirits. But no, it was not to be so!

Ever since they left Camelot, his idiot of a man servant made it a point to loudly and noisily complain about the injustices in hunting! That annoying idiot! Men had to eat did they not? They were not rabbits or goats who would peacefully nibble at grass. Real men needed meat to be strong and protect.

But no, Merlin would rather befriend a deer than eat it! No wonder he was so scrawny- all bones no meat. If this went on, he would never find himself a girl. Really, what girl would ever look at a bag of

bones? No girl would want a beau whose waist was slimmer than hers! He would know. He was after all a happily married man.

He wondered when it had all gone so wrong. Was the hunt damned ever since the very beginning? Because; thanks to his every helpful servant they had only managed to snare a pheasant and a hare for their dinner. No big game to proudly take back home. But Arthur was a stubborn man, he refused to let Merlin win. He refused to go back empty handed. What kind of King would he be if he could not even bag a boar or a deer? That would be shameful. Just because Merlin's heart seemed to melt every time he gazed upon a deer did not mean that he would let an animal out of his clutches again! The first two times were bad enough. If anyone other than his trusted knights had been there, they would have thought of him to be soft- and a King can't be soft! Forget Camelot- he would be the laughing stock of all Five Kingdoms.

With that in mind, come morning, he was rather enthused to hunt down a deer- Merlin be damn. But did things ever happen as he wished for? ****Never****!

No sooner had they broken camp, they had been ambushed by bandits.

Really, after all these years did the bandits learn nothing? They must be rather dim to cross paths with the knights of Camelot again and again! Even he knew by now how the events would turn out.

The horses would be spooked and immediately run off.

Any bandit hiding in the trees would either lose their weapons or fall off their perch.

The ones on the ground would either trip on air, drop their weapons or even aim terribly.

All the drama would culminate with the knights and himself being knocked out. (Over the years he had come to respect his hard head).

Finally he would wake up to his idiotic manservant flashing his pearly whites at him and congratulating him on yet another muddled up victory.

So yes that did happen. The script was perfected over the years. One that no one questioned.

They all even knew what came next. Percival and Gwaine went after the horses while Merlin and he took care of the bodies and the campsite.

See this was routine, ****this**** was normal. What was not normal, was another bunch of annoying bandits making their presence known while they got rid of their predecessors' bodies.

By then Arthur was pissed! He could only take one band of bandits a day! And he had not yet caught any game. Some fine trip this was turning out to be! All. Because. Of. That. Fool. Merlin. The fool who was holding a sword by his side.

As the bandits surrounded them; Arthur looked at Merlin. He could see the panic in his eyes as he scanned the enemy, his sword and finally Arthur. Then making up his mind he held his sword up and said, "What do you think Arthur? Think we can hold them off till Gwaine and Percival get back?"

The idiot! He was actually going to use the sword? He was possibly the worst swordsman in the Five Kingdoms combined! That's when his patience snapped. Was a hunt too much to ask for? He was the King for crying out loud! There had to be some justice for all his pains. With that though he dropped his sword to the ground and covered his eyes.

"Er, Arthur," Merlin voice floated.

"What," he snapped.

"What are you doing?"

"Waiting."

"Waiting?"

"Yes, are you done?"

"Am I done?"

"Really Merlin, are you going to repeat everything I say," he grumbled. "Get on with it."

"Get on with what Arthur? Are you all right? Did you hit your head too hard?" Merlin asked in panic tugging at Arthur's hands.

With a growl Arthur uncovered his eyes to glare at his perplexed friend and a bunch of shocked bandits who were rooted at their place. Pulling together the dregs of all his Kingly patience together he calmly said, "Merlin please, I'm begging of you. Get rid of the bandits so we can ****finally**** get on with our hunt. The past month was torturous and ****all**** I wanted was some time to relax with my friends. Is it too much to ask? Our whole trip has been disastrous. And I have already been knocked out today. My quota is over. I ****refuse**** to conk out again! Even my head can get tender! So blow them off and we can proceed with our day before I lose my mind."

"I don't blowâ€|" sputtered Merlin.

The King glared, "I ****don't**** care! Turn them into ferrets for all I care!"

Having given his Warlock his leave, the Once and Future King promptly clasped his hands back over his eyes.

2. Aftermath

****Since I have been asked what happens nextâ€|So here goes:****

"Arthur remove your hands," Merlin said exasperatingly.

Arthur complied. He looked around the clearing and asked in puzzlement, "But where are the ferrets? I mean the bandits."

"They _ran_ off! _You_ scared them off! You happy, you _clotpole_? _Who_ in their right mind throws away his sword while facing a foe? Some Regent King you are! Is this how it's going to be from now on? The future King of Camelot behaving like an imbecile?" Merlin gesticulated wildly.

"Butâ€|"

"All these years I have been trying to keep you from killing yourself; do you know how difficult that job is without you acting like a prat? And now? You start this new childish antic? Aren't you a _Knight_? Weren't you trained to _kill_ from birth? Where does dropping your weapon come up in Knight's training?" Merlin paced around, arms moving wildly.

Arthur tried to intervene, "I was trying to help.."

"_Help_? You call _that_ help? Oh, let me just drop my weapon and close my eyes. Bandits? What bandits? They won't stab a defenceless man. Their crossbows would be useless too. Do you know _why_? Because, you are _so_ thick that the bolts wouldn't penetrate your obnoxious hide!" Merlin ranted.

"But youâ€|" trailed off Arthur.

"I what?" Merlin finally asked dangerously.

"You are too reluctant to use magic when you think we are coherent enough; and my head really hurts- I didn't want to get hit in the head _again_ only for you to do your thing," mumbled Arthur looking contrite.

Silence fell in the clearing. Till then it had been easy to skirt through the fringes of the issue. But then Arthur had to mention the 'M word'. With that, it was like everything was out in the open.

Arthur knew.

He _knew_- for a while it seemed.

He _knew_- and took it in stride that Merlin would use magic regularly.

He _knew_- and it looked like he had no problem.

****Arthur**** _knew_- yet he never said a word.

He _never_ said a word!

In the span of a few seconds, Merlin felt a plethora of emotions waring in him. Annoyanceâ€| angerâ€| hurtâ€| disbeliefâ€| reliefâ€| astonishmentâ€| euphoriaâ€| bafflement. He couldn't think straight. This was not how it was supposed to go. Finally, he latched onto his confusion as he looked Arthur in the eyes and softly said, "You never said anything. All this time you knew yet you kept quiet. I don't understand."

Arthur sighed. This was not how he had envisioned this matter to arise. This was too early, his hands were still tied. But he owed it to his friend. He just had to frame his answer properly. "You never told me either, Merlin," he countered. Seeing the look on Merlin's face he almost wished he hadn't. But now that he had opened his big mouth, might as well plough through. "Come on Merlin humour me. If we are to have this conversation, both of us have to be honest- keep nothing from each other. You tell me your reasons and I'll tell you mine," he reasoned kindly as he sat himself comfortably on the forest floor.

After a moment, Merlin dropped by his side, "First, I feared for my life. I have spent all my life hiding- it's not easy for me to trust anyone with my secret. I have never told anyone either. Those very few people who knew, they found out themselves and confronted meâ€|"

"I'm not surprised, you are hardly subtle," snorted Arthur. At Merlin's glare, Arthur clapped his hands over his mouth, hiding his smirk.

"I realise that, prat. So yes, I was scared and then when we became friends; it made things more difficult. I hated lying to you but I was too scared to lose your friendship. And to be honest all your life you had only see the evils of magic- I could hardly blame you if saw me as evilâ€|"

"**Never**, Merlin. You must trust me on that. I could never do that to you," interrupted Arthur.

"I know now, yes. But with a secret like that, I always expected the worst," nodded Merlin. "Even with that reassurance, I don't think I could have told you something that could have you question your vows to the King."

"I think you have put your finger on the problem, the King, my father," sighed Arthur. "In all this you were thinking about me. My honour, my vows. And I was thinking about you. Like I said, you are not very subtle. I will admit I was at sorts when I realised you have been helping me with magic all along. Before you came along, I had never been so lucky nor had I ever managed to defeat magical foes so easily. You have been the only constant in all my glory. My silent protector. But at this moment, my hands are tied. All I can do for you is watch your back and keep your secret. It pains me to say that while my father is King, you are safest in the shadows. No matter how you use your gifts, he is too blinded in his beliefs to see otherwise. So my plan was simple. Let things continue as it always has been till I am King, then only would I be in a position to keep you safe. And it was even working well. A simple system, a blind eye- and no one is wiser and you are safe."

Merlin took a moment to digest what Arthur said. Admittedly, it was really mature and touching what he had tried to do- he was definitely worthy of the title of The Once and Future King. Later, when the right time came, he definitely would not let Arthur live this conversation down. But for now he needed know, "Since when?"

At the same time, Arthur too spoke, "Who else?"

"Lancelot. He heard me enchant his weapon to help kill the Griffin. And Gaius, I saved him from a fall just before I met him."

"Grettir spoke of Courage, Strength, and Magic at the quest for the Fisher King's trident. Till then I had my suspicions; but that was when I knew for sure."

The friends sat in silence, taking their time to absorb the vast revelations that just occurred. It was liberating for both of them.

Finally Merlin broke the silence, "Well Arthur, maybe we should get on with your hunt then. Can't have you getting all morose and pouty and blurting out my secret again."

"I don't get pouty! You are the girl Merlin," exclaimed Arthur indignantly. "But you are right we should get going. Speaking of which, shouldn't Gwaine and Percival be back by now? I hope they did not run into trouble."

"Oh, how gracious of you to remember us, Sire!" Gwaine emerged from behind a clump of bushes with the horses; calling, "Percival, they made up. It's safe to come out now!"

End
file.